

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 451

By Gardenhire

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Halbert Floyd Dennis of Chattanooga.

WHEREAS, it was with great sadness that the members of this General Assembly learned of the passing of Halbert Floyd Dennis, J.D., who served his fellow citizens with distinction as a legislator, state administrator, professor of special education, and attorney and advocate for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities; and

WHEREAS, a native of Shelbyville, Mr. Dennis interrupted his college education to enlist in the United States Air Force, serving from 1951-1955; a veteran of the Korean War, he attained the rank of technical sergeant and was awarded the National Defense Medal, Korean Service Medal, United Nations Service Medal, Good Conduct Medal, and the ROK Presidential Unit citation emblem; and

WHEREAS, after graduating from Vanderbilt University Law School in 1958, Mr. Dennis began a lengthy and distinguished life of service to his fellow Tennesseans by representing the 18th District in the Tennessee Senate during the 81st General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, after ending his career as an elected official, he served as special counsel for the Tennessee Legislative Council Committee on Mental Health during the 82nd and 83rd General Assemblies, attorney for the Tennessee Limited Constitutional Convention of 1965, director of the Tennessee Criminal Law Revision Commission, and an assistant district attorney general; and

WHEREAS, in 1967, Senator Dennis was appointed state coordinator of Tennessee's retardation programs within the Department of Mental Health, Division of Retardation, where he served under Dr. Nat Winston; and

WHEREAS, Governor Buford Ellington asked him to investigate and report on the status and needs of Tennessee's citizens with intellectual disabilities, which request led him to produce the seminal policy document *Tennessee Plans for Her Retarded Citizens*, one of the first comprehensive state plans for this vulnerable population conceived in the United States and used as a model by several of Tennessee's sister states; thereafter, he became nationally recognized as a legal theorist, activist, and prolific scholar in the field of developmental and intellectual disabilities; and

WHEREAS, in 1973, Mr. Dennis joined the faculty of George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University as professor of special education; he served as chairman of the Department of Special Education, the nation's preeminent program in the field, from 1979-1982 and retired as Professor Emeritus; and

WHEREAS, during his illustrious tenure at Peabody, Professor Dennis served as a research fellow of the John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development and the director of the Kennedy Center Institute on Youth and Social Development; and

WHEREAS, an early promoter and organizer of community services for persons with intellectual disabilities, he worked tirelessly to improve both their societal position and their access to equal protection under the law; and

WHEREAS, Professor Dennis championed the principle of "normalization" throughout the United States and helped formulate and pass both Tennessee's Right to Education law and the federal counterpart, both of which guarantee children with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate education; and

WHEREAS, he served as counsel or as an expert witness in multiple landmark federal cases challenging the widespread state governmental policy of "warehousing" its citizens with intellectual disabilities without any attempt at habilitation and integration into the community; he also formulated the initial concept that has been developed into such present-day programs as Court Appointed Special Advocates; and

WHEREAS, Professor Dennis served on the President's Committee on Mental Retardation and as an official delegate to the White House Conference on Children and a special consultant to various court systems, including the Tennessee Supreme Court; and

WHEREAS, once active in nearly all community-based programs for persons with intellectual disabilities in Tennessee, Professor Dennis served as a founding member of the board of directors of Home2, Inc., and president of the Tennessee Association for Retarded Citizens; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Dennis was predeceased by his wife Elizabeth Tittsworth Dennis; and

WHEREAS, he is survived by his present wife, Pauline Privett Dennis; children, John (Julie) Dennis, Tricia (Mohamed Mustafa) Dennis, and Patrick Dennis; grandchildren, David Dennis, Sarah Dennis (Nick) Manners, and Katherine Mustafa; and a great-grandson, Hayden Manners; and

WHEREAS, it is most fitting that we should remember the purposeful life of this dedicated and multi-talented educator and attorney; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Halbert Floyd Dennis, Professor Emeritus of Vanderbilt University, reflecting fondly upon his generosity of spirit, his expertise, and his compassion in service of persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and extend our condolences to Professor Dennis's family, colleagues, and friends.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.